

THE POWER OF MUSIC AND THE MUSIC OF POWER:  
"NAZI" MUSICIANS IN AMERICA, 1945-1949

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Word Count: 12,670  
April 6, 2016

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Professors Hilary Hallett and Volker Berghahn for their invaluable insights, criticisms, and boundless generosity of time and spirit. I wish also to thank historian Carol S. Gruber for inviting me to her home, sharing her extensive knowledge on this subject and for reading my drafts. I am grateful as well to Lindsay Dayton and Elliott Cairns who kept me inspired and helped me find invaluable sources of material. Thank you as well to Professor Ellen Hampton for her guidance as I embarked on this project and for igniting my passion for archival research.

Thank you to Johanna Sherrier and Danielle Dunbar for your love and willingness to listen to me talk through all my roadblocks. Thank you Ana Stanescu for your friendship and support and for accommodating me on my various research trips to Washington D.C. Thank you Columbia University for the opportunity to learn and grow surrounded by brilliant professors and students.

## INTRODUCTION

In July 2001, the internationally acclaimed Jewish conductor Daniel Barenboim performed with the Berlin Staatskapelle Orchestra in Jerusalem as part of Israel's national arts festival. His program for the weekend originally included a performance of Richard Wagner's famous "Ride of the Valkyries." Barenboim agreed to exclude the piece, however, when the program aroused widespread disapproval against the inclusion of Wagner. The atrocities of Hitler's regime, including the Night of the Broken Glass and the genocide of the Holocaust, inspired an informal ban of Wagner's music in Israel that continues to this day.<sup>1</sup>

During an encore of his Saturday night performance, Barenboim surprised his audience by asking them if they wanted to hear Wagner. A tense debate ensued; some walked out shouting "fascist!" or "concentration camp music!" Although most of the audience stayed and awarded Barenboim a standing ovation for his performance of the overture to *Tristan und Isolde*, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, and President Moshe Katsav publically condemned the encore. Olmert called Barenboim's behavior "brazen, arrogant, insensitive and uncivilized," and threatened to blacklist the conductor from performing in future cultural events in Jerusalem. Barenboim later issued an apology and took full responsibility for the impropriety.<sup>2</sup>

The Barenboim scandal in Israel is one of a constellation of controversies affecting German musicians and musicians of German music that dates to the Second World War. It illustrated the enduring divide in public opinion concerning German music's political legacies. In

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<sup>1</sup> Ross, Alex. "The Case for Wagner in Israel." *The New Yorker*. September 25, 2012. Accessed online on December 28, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-case-for-wagner-in-israel>

<sup>2</sup> For coverage of this performance, see: MacAskill, Ewen, "Barenboim stirs up Israeli storm by playing Wagner." *The Guardian*. 9 July 2001. Accessed Online 2 October 2015; Mazelis, Fred, "Daniel Barenboim conducts Wagner in Israel." *World Socialist Web Site*. 1 August 2001. Accessed Online 3 November 2015.

the years following the defeat of Nazi Germany, intense scrutiny also targeted Kirsten Flagstad, Walter Gieseking, and Wilhelm Furtwängler, all prominent and acclaimed musicians of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who were perceived as associated with the Nazi regime. Each was the subject of public uproar as they attempted to resume their careers in the United States and met with suspicion in the press and among many within the classical music community. The consequences of their postwar attempts to concertize in the U.S. revealed the divergent attitudes between European musicians and the American public about the relationship between art and politics. This thesis will analyze the trajectories of their early postwar careers, exploring press articles, memoirs and archived materials to engage the question of American musical reception of “Nazi” musicians from 1945 to 1949. Flagstad, Gieseking and Furtwängler’s experiences offer a glimpse into the challenges of musical denazification and the American perception of the Nazis’ appropriation of music as a pillar of their power. The outcomes of these musicians’ professional rehabilitation illuminated the extent of the American public’s emotionally charged conflation of politics, war, and music.

I selected Flagstad, Gieseking and Furtwängler as case studies because they were identified during and after the war as “Nazi” or “enemy” artists in American presses. Each also represented a different relationship to German music as performers and as Nazi-appropriated icons. My study will show how these differences impacted the denazification and postwar reception of each musician. Allied officials and audiences often assumed their culpability despite very different circumstances characterizing their wartime relationships with the Nazi regime. These comparisons have contrapuntal value, which I will detail below.

Kirsten Flagstad was a celebrated Norwegian soprano before the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war ended she represented a confusing binary for the American public. As

a Norwegian native, she was inherently a victim of Nazi belligerence and occupation. As a world famous Wagnerian soprano, she was an icon of German Romanticism, which became acutely associated with Nazism during and after the war. Although she never permanently resided in Germany, she was a veteran performer at the world famous Bayreuth Festival, which to this day annually showcases Wagner's operas. She eventually moved to the United States and became the darling of the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. Her 1934 debut as Sieglinde in Wagner's *Die Walküre* "made an immediate and indeed irresistible appeal to the audience. [...] No Sieglinde of the last ten years has made such an impression here, by her voice, stage business, and dramatic sincerity[.]"<sup>3</sup> She became known for her "treatment of Wagner's melo[die]s [...] marked by a lyric grace of line."<sup>4</sup> In 1941, however, Flagstad returned to Nazi-occupied Norway to rejoin her husband, Norwegian businessman Henry Johansen, who was still living there. This decision generated an enormous controversy in the U.S. when she booked her first New York City recital at Carnegie Hall after her return in 1947. It illustrated the extent to which association with "enemy" music could taint an artist even though Flagstad was not German.

The eminent German pianist Walter Gieseking was the center of arguably the most dramatic and spectacular musical scandal in postwar America. Like Flagstad, Gieseking's perceived identity as an enemy artist has strange foundations. He was renowned for his interpretations of French Impressionist works, arguably the antithesis of Nazi musical tastes, which favored German Romanticism. In fact, American critics praised Gieseking's nuanced style of playing. In 1932, *New York Times* music critic Olin Downes lauded him "as one of the pianists who stand in a significant place, wholly their own, among leading virtuosi[.]" Downes commented on how Gieseking "has always been an artist of rare sensitiveness, who cultivated a

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<sup>3</sup> Downes, Olin. "Kirsten Flagstad Greeted at Debut: Norwegian Soprano Scores a Success as Sieglinde..." *The New York Times*. February 3, 1935, N4.

<sup>4</sup> "Wagner's Operas for Cycle Listed." *The New York Times*. January 14, 1935, 12.

style *wholly denuded* [...] *of the pianistic excesses of the so-called 'romantic' school*" [italics added].<sup>5</sup> After the Second World War ended, the pianist was mired in controversy, but Allied officials eventually removed Walter Giesecking from blacklists that prohibited him to perform. Still, the announcement of his first postwar concert in New York City was met with widespread public outcry. This thesis evaluates how Giesecking was labeled an “enemy” musician and became such a controversial figure to the American public. I will further analyze American government responses that guided the course of events leading to his *de facto* deportation in 1949 in anticipation of his first postwar performance at Carnegie Hall.

Wilhelm Furtwängler, one of the most famous conductors in the world in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the most polarizing musical celebrities after the Second World War. Although Furtwängler never joined the Nazi Party, he played a prominent role in the Nazi cultural apparatus and conducted at Party rallies and performances. Despite support from renowned musicians around the world—some of whom fled Nazi Germany themselves—Furtwängler’s reputation in America never fully recovered because of his associations with the Nazi regime. He held the permanent directorship for the Berlin Philharmonic until his death in 1954, but the United States never invited the orchestra for a postwar tour. In 1949, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra offered him a position as a guest conductor, which evoked protests from some of America’s most famous classical musicians. Although historical sources point to the fact that Furtwängler did not embrace the Nazi Party’s racist ideologies, the consistently punitive narrative put forth by the American press caused irreparable harm to his reputation. I will argue that Furtwängler’s career in the United States suffered as an expression of the public’s complete disavowal of the Third Reich and its musical culture.

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<sup>5</sup> Downes, Olin. “Giesecking and Gabrilowitsch Give Brilliant Exhibitions of Their Art.” *The New York Times*. February 22, 1932, 22.

Historical work about the extent to which the Nazi Party appropriated German Romantic music as a pillar of their power is extensive, and certain aspects contextualize the political atmosphere in which Flagstad, Giesecking, and Furtwängler's postwar controversies unfolded. Wagnerian-inspired theatricality figured visibly in the Nazis' international public identity. Hitler was an ardent fan of Wagner's operas, and historian Joachim Fest cites Hitler's own "talents as [a] stage manager," producing "spectacles" "carried out to its ultimate point in the operatic excesses of party rallies."<sup>6</sup> According to the eminent historian Alan Bullock, when Berlin hosted the 1936 Olympics, the "opportunity was used with great skill to put the Third Reich on show" before the international community. The Nuremberg Party Rally that preceded the Olympic commencement lasted a full week and "was on a scale which even Nazi pageantry had never before equaled."<sup>7</sup> Wagnerian bombast thus became a distinct and recognizable characteristic of Nazi power both domestically and abroad, which strongly affected the perception of German musicians in the postwar period.

It is also important to note how the Nazi political apparatus penetrated Germany's musical culture through complex administrative structures, headed by the Reich Music Chamber (*Reichsmusikkammer*). Historian Michael Meyer documented these intricacies in *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich*. Nazi propaganda master Joseph Goebbels and Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg commandeered musicological journals such as *Die Musik* to project Germany's musical culture as evidence of their racial superiority. They further wished to preserve national and ethnic German (*völkisch*) perspectives serving the ideology and "scholarly façade" of the Nazi State. This led Rosenberg to centralize control over cultural activity through organizations

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<sup>6</sup> Joachim Fest, *Hitler* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 513-520.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny (Abridged Version)*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962. Abridged version, 1971), 197.



such as the Militant League of German Culture (*Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur*).<sup>8</sup> The disputed extent to which Giesecking and Furtwängler participated in Nazi musical apparatuses figured significantly into the American public's understanding of their culpability as Nazi supporters.

While examination of the importance of music in Nazi culture is extensive, historical literature on the controversies featured in this thesis is remarkably thin. Historians of musical denazification tend to focus on Allied occupational policies rather than their impact on musicians' careers. Historian and musicologist Toby Thacker's *Music After Hitler, 1945-1955* stresses the confusion occupiers experienced as they faced the difficult task of determining the extent to which German musicians supported the Nazi regime. According to Thacker, although the Allied forces were "committed to the exclusion of former Nazis from musical activities in the public sphere," it was a commitment "fraught with complications." He asserts the "American commitment to denazification in music brought them frustration, and the profound hostility of the German population in their zone."<sup>9</sup> Notably, Thacker suggests "young and completely inexperienced [American] officers" were responsible for vetting "the most highly developed musical culture in the world, and censoring its repertoire." In his view, confusion about the role of music in Nazi rule arose because American officers "objected particularly to the appearance in public of musicians who had been popular under the Nazis," though they had "no clear proof they had been Nazi sympathizers."<sup>10</sup> Although Thacker tends to present more balanced observations about German musicians, he scarcely engages the significance of the controversies that engulfed them in the postwar period and fails to take into account their importance in understanding the effects of denazification.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Meyer, *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 33-36.

<sup>9</sup> See Alvin Johnson, "Denazification." *Social Research*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (March 1947), pp. 59-74 and Artur Sträter. "Denazification." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 260, "Postwar Reconstruction in Western Germany," (November 1948), pp. 43-52 for further discussion on German dissatisfaction with denazification.

<sup>10</sup> Toby Thacker, *Music After Hitler, 1945-1955*. (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 39-45.

Canadian historian David Monod adopts a far more critical view of German musicians in his *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification and the Americans, 1945-1953*. While his study features fine work on the mechanisms and contradictions of musical denazification under Allied occupation, he often exaggerates German musicians' alleged ties to the Nazi Party. He asserts his work "is not devoted to naming names or exposing lies; [...] Rather, my interests lie in exploring the debate over what should have been done with Germany's tainted generation of musicians and its debased culture."<sup>11</sup> These troubling assumptions—that Germany's musical culture was "tainted," "debased" and needed to be dealt with—undermine much of his analysis. He presumes that "the major difficulty [of denazification] was that most of the more popular musicians had either attained or sustained their profile under the Nazis by accommodating themselves to the regime."<sup>12</sup> However, he fails to qualify these claims by more broadly analyzing the situation in which musicians and citizens found themselves when Hitler came to power in 1933, a topic that has been more thoroughly explored in historical works documenting the pressures that drove collaborationism in Nazi Europe.<sup>13</sup>

This led Monod to interpret historical developments of the postwar era to match his negative perceptions of German artists. For example, although Allied occupiers initially blacklisted Furtwängler and Gieseking, they were both eventually exonerated. Nevertheless, Monod's critique of their character borders on hostile, denouncing Gieseking and Furtwängler as "collaborator[s] and opportunist[s]."<sup>14</sup> Overall, these reductive portrayals illuminate the primary weakness of *Settling Scores*. Monod characterizes German musicians largely according to press

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<sup>11</sup> Monod, David. *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945-1953*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Monod, David. *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945-1953*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 86.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, István Deák, *Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution During World War II* (Boulder: Westview, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Monod, *Settling Scores*, 159.

articles of the period—several of which will be examined in this thesis—without taking into account the biases that shaped those narratives.

Because historical literature on musical denazification tends to focus on occupational policies, this thesis will investigate the relationship between music and politics in the American imaginary from 1945 to 1949. In the immediate aftermath of the war, evidence points to a sharply divided appreciation of this relationship among Americans. For several American veterans and musicians, the Nazis employed music as a powerful component of their power and German musicians thus upheld the prestige of the Third Reich. However, the three artists featured in this thesis, and their defenders among America's musical elite, demonstrated again and again that their only allegiance was to their artistic integrity. This raises the question, to what degree did disagreement over these musicians' political and artistic legacies contribute to the postwar controversies that engulfed Flagstad, Giesecking and Furtwängler? Moreover, what were the consequences of non-artists engaging in such a heated debate about music's relationship to politics?

This thesis will therefore analyze the postwar reception of Kirsten Flagstad, Walter Giesecking, and Wilhelm Furtwängler in order to re-examine the political atmosphere that shaped the American press's perceptions of them. While it is impossible to definitively know what was in the hearts and minds of these musicians, I will employ archived materials and memoirs to create counter-narratives that attempt to determine the extent of their culpability as supporters of the Nazi regime. I will further illuminate how these factors contributed to the consequences each artist faced when they returned to the United States to perform after the end of the Second World War.

The first chapter of this thesis will introduce the scope of wartime discourses concerning music and politics and contextualize how they affected the mechanisms of musical denazification. The second chapter will demonstrate how Flagstad's perceived role as a supportive housewife generated a gendered interpretation of her actions that initially sparked controversy but also—later—defused it and supported her return to prominence in the United States. The third chapter will describe Giesecking's scandal and his *de facto* deportation to illustrate how veterans' and interest groups exerted political power to shape public opinion and governmental policy against the pianist. The last chapter will evaluate the experiences of Wilhelm Furtwängler and determine how a musician so beloved in the interwar period became so controversial when significant evidence points to his ideological opposition to the most vile elements of Nazism. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how the American press and special interest groups unfairly exaggerated the culpability of German musicians, shaping a punitive narrative that fostered scandal in the U.S.'s inflamed postwar political atmosphere. However, I will also show how Flagstad, Giesecking and Furtwängler's postwar careers were contingent on their public image. Their often tone-deaf responses to scandal, coupled with a general opinion among many Americans that they benefitted from denazification procedures that were incoherent and ineffective, fomented their controversies and impacted their outcomes.

## CHAPTER 1

### Historical Background: Music, Politics and Denazification

Two crucial contextual elements shaped the reception of Flagstad, Giesecking and Furtwangler. This chapter will briefly examine the advancement of wartime discourses entangling music and politics. Then I will explain the procedural aspects of cultural denazification and how geopolitical forces contributed to its outcomes. Together, these forces generated perceptions about German music that significantly affected the American reception of Flagstad, Giesecking and Furtwängler.

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The question of music's value as political currency gained prominence during the Second World War and influenced postwar discrimination against German artists. Erika Mann, a German expatriate who fled the Nazi regime with her father, the celebrated novelist Thomas Mann, spearheaded a public crusade against German music in the United States. In a letter to *The New York Times* published on February 15, 1942, she promoted the notion that art was inseparable from wartime politics. She dismissed the idea that during the war against Germany "Beethoven remains Beethoven; Wagner remains Wagner; Strauss remains Strauss." She argued instead that:

Strauss put his genius at the disposal of the enemy of mankind. At this moment he is apt to conduct for the benefit of Mr. Hitler's storm troopers to inspire them in their murderous assault on civilization [...]; likely to sit at Mr. Hitler's table, as he has in the past.

Yet, at this moment we find ourselves not merely sheepishly listening to his music, but also accumulating good American dollars to be handed over to this true "alien enemy[.]"<sup>15</sup> [...] I wish to confess that I don't like the idea that I'd rather forget about

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Strauss pioneered efforts for contemporary art music composers to collect royalty payments for their compositions. See Michael H. Kater, *Composers of the Nazi Era* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 281.

Strauss for the time being, even though some of his works are masterpieces.<sup>16</sup>

This final point, which calls to mind Barenboim's Wagner scandal in Israel, highlighted some of the primary concerns of the American public: Does the support of an enemy's music and culture equate to support of the enemy overall? A letter to the editor responding to Erika Mann's denunciation in *The Times* offered a contrapuntal argument to this salient issue, stating,

I, in turn, protest against [Erika Mann's article] with all the vigor at my command, for it is an indication of how political anti-fascism can be carried to the extreme of actual intellectual fascism. These are words which Der Fuehrer himself might have used at almost any time[.]<sup>17</sup>

This binary forms the core of postwar questions concerning German music and musicians, and it appears again and again in the discourse of various publications. Interestingly, there is also a divided opinion among German refugees concerning the treatment given to former musicians of the Third Reich, a topic that will be treated in later chapters.

When the Allies achieved the unconditional surrender of Germany in 1945, denazification became a primary and shared objective among the victorious powers. They aimed to cleanse Germany of Nazis, assure that those guilty of supporting Nazi rule would be punished, and reeducate Germans to secure a permanent peace in Europe. However, the Allied powers each envisaged their own interpretation of how this would take place and whom would be most affected. The Soviet Union planned to eradicate Nazism with major socioeconomic structural changes and the installation of communism. The United States initially favored the notion of "collective guilt," whereby "all Germans were bad Germans,"<sup>18</sup> and the April 1945 Joint Chiefs

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<sup>16</sup> Mann, Erika, "Erika Mann Protests." *The New York Times*. February 15, 1942, X12.

<sup>17</sup> Pogue, Samuel F. "By Way of Reply: A Reader Takes Issue With Erika Mann More on the Matter of Pronunciation." *The New York Times*. February 22, 1942, X10.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany 1918-2008: The Divided Nation*. (Oxford: Fontana Ltd, 1991, Third Edition 2009), 122.

of Staff Directive 1067 (JCS 1067) dissolved entirely Germany's political and economic sovereignty. The nascent Cold War rivalry between the superpowers came to have a strong impact on the trajectory of denazification, especially when it came to German musicians.

Musical denazification proceeded with a level of incoherence that reflected the overall philosophical problem of extricating art from politics, and can be characterized as circuitous and overcrowded with various actors and interests. Postwar Germany was divided into occupational zones governed by each of the victorious powers: the U.S., France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. In the American zone, the Intelligence Section of the Psychological Warfare Department, whose primary role was to culturally reeducate Germany, composed white, grey and black lists that determined the eligibility of suspected Nazi sympathizers to return to the workforce. Persons on the "black" and "grey unacceptable" lists were ineligible for work above manual labor; those on the "grey acceptable" list could work within their profession but were excluded from civil service; those on the "white" list were free to work in any realm of professional life.<sup>19</sup>

Although "music control" was a shared objective among the Allied occupying powers, rivalry and philosophical differences generated social discord in Germany. This was especially true in heavily-divided Berlin, where the incongruities of denazification were "readily apparent to the locals." The Americans were "deeply perturbed that their allies did not share their zeal for cultural denazification." British and French forces recognized American blacklists of German cultural elites but rarely enforced them. For example, when American officials blacklisted Walter Gieseeking, French officials permitted him to perform and teach in the French zone.<sup>20</sup> Surviving blacklists from the American zone illustrate this increasingly chaotic situation in 1945. They were hastily typed, "draconian, inevitably arbitrary, and partial," leaving hundreds of

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<sup>19</sup> Monod, David. *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945-1953*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 47.

<sup>20</sup> Monod, *Settling Scores*, 69, 157-158.

professional musicians facing an uncertain future.<sup>21</sup> Among the Allied powers, the U.S. most forcefully politicized music and musicians from the inception of denazification.

Denazification processes became increasingly protracted and disorganized in 1946. Blacklists lost their intended efficacy as the responsibility for denazification shifted from direct occupational control to local tribunals (*Spruchkammern*) according to the March 1946 Law for the Liberation from National Socialism and Militarism. The sluggish progress of the *Spruchkammern* to denazify American occupiers' growing list of blacklisted musicians left German orchestras in a state of perpetual limbo. Meanwhile, the American Major General Robert A. McClure, under political pressure from various interest groups exerting influence in Washington D.C., introduced new "exclusionary processes" to prohibit musicians from performing. Professional musicians were thus simultaneously held accountable to several different branches of the U.S. Military Government and *Spruchkammern*, which put musical life in Germany at a standstill.<sup>22</sup>

This began to change in 1947 when the Soviet zone began swiftly exonerating musicians to rebuild Berlin's cultural life and rehabilitate their own reputation in Germany. The "Soviets appear to have understood how far they had to travel to rebuild respect for their forces. They were the soldiers the Germans most despised, they were the ones most responsible for Nazism's defeat, and they were the ones who captured Berlin." In an official document, Soviet intelligence officer Nicolas Nabokov explained the Soviets' motivations to "secretly castigate the Americans and British as suppressors of German culture."<sup>23</sup> Under pressure, American occupiers thus had to

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<sup>21</sup> Thacker, *Music After Hitler*, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Thacker, *Music After Hitler*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Monod, *Settling Scores*, 70. For more discussion on this topic, see David Tompkins, *Composing the Party Line: Music and Politics in East Germany, 1948-1957* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2013).



hasten their own musical denazification procedures to compete against the Soviets for influence and allegiance with the future reconstructed Germany.<sup>24</sup>

This abrupt reversal in tactics on the part of the U.S. cast a long shadow over the perceptions of the American public. Hardliners viewed German musicians as beneficiaries of a flawed denazification process and deserving of continued suspicion and scrutiny. Many denazified musicians, however, remained popular among America's musical elite. This polarization of opinion laid the groundwork for the controversies that unfolded between 1946 and 1949, which will be the subject of the following chapters.

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<sup>24</sup> For more on denazification in Germany, see: Michael Balfour, *Four-Power Control in Germany and Austria, 1945-1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956); Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson, *The Political Re-education of Germany and her Allies after World War II* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: a History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995); Constantine Fitzgibbon, *Denazification* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969); Lucius D. Clay, *The Papers of General Lucius D. Clay: Germany, 1945-1949* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974); John Gimbel, *The American Occupation of Germany; politics and the military, 1945-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968); Edward N. Peterson, *The American Occupation of Germany: Retreat to Victory* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977); James F. Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Harold Zink, *American Military Government in Germany* (New York: MacMillan, 1947).

## CHAPTER 2

Kirsten Flagstad

*“How Will I Sing Us Out of This Sorrow?” – Björk*

Kirsten Flagstad emerged as one of the more unusual cases of America’s reception of “Nazi” musicians in the postwar period. Unlike the other artists investigated in this thesis, Flagstad was not German, she never permanently resided in Nazi Germany, and Allied occupiers never placed her on the blacklists of denazification. So what caused the beloved star of the Metropolitan Opera to fall so far from grace, and why did the public’s enmity against her seemingly evaporate? This chapter examines the Flagstad scandal that erupted in New York City. Drawn into controversy by her husband’s profiteering allegations, contemporary attitudes about husband-wife dynamics guided her controversy. It will be shown that perceptions of Flagstad were indelibly linked to her husband, whose death in 1946 allowed her to return to prominence as the eminent soprano for which she is still remembered today.

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Flagstad’s life and career were sharply interrupted when, on April 9, 1940, Nazi Germany’s Wehrmacht army overwhelmed Norway, whose forces quickly surrendered. As the invasion was taking place, Vidkun Quisling, a military figure with fascist affinities, staged an opportunistic *coup d’état*. Quisling exhorted the Norwegian people to “turn their backs on England and submit to German protection.” Norwegians widely distrusted Quisling, however, and sharply criticized his *Rikshird*, an SS-inspired garrison of storm troopers that wreaked havoc

across Norway. When Norway was liberated, leaders denounced Quisling as a traitor and he was executed for war crimes in 1945.<sup>25</sup>

Flagstad was on tour in Cleveland, Ohio, when she learned of the Nazi invasion of Norway and the Quisling coup. Out of concern for her family still living there she interrupted her tour schedule and returned to New York City on April 14, 1940. Upon her arrival, she received a telegram from her husband, Henry Johansen: “Stay where you are. We are all right.” That summer, Flagstad received news that her twenty-one year old stepdaughter, Anne Johansen, had escaped Norway and planned to travel to the United States through Japan, which had not yet entered the war. Flagstad’s frequent accompanist and companion Edwin McArthur ominously notes in his memoirs, “I have never to this day understood how Annie had managed this. [...] There is no denying either at the time, although [Kirsten] Flagstad didn’t know it, Mr. Johansen was a member of the [Quisling] political party then in power. I suspect it was through this influence that Annie was able to make the trip.”<sup>26</sup> On October 7, 1940, after several setbacks, Anne Johansen finally arrived in the United States. The *New York Herald Tribune* supported McArthur’s claims and characterized Anne Johansen as a “Norse refugee” and sympathized with Flagstad. “Kirsten Flagstad,” it reported, “ceased to be a singer for just three hours today—she was just a mother waiting for the girl she hadn’t see in many months.”<sup>27</sup>

To the surprise of many, shortly after this reunion, Flagstad decided to return to Norway and rejoin her husband, who sent several increasingly distressing messages by October, 1940.<sup>28</sup> Despite news of her impending departure, she remained immensely popular in New York City. Flagstad gave her last performance at the Metropolitan Opera on April 12, 1941 playing the lead

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<sup>25</sup>Alexandra Andreevna Voronine Yourieff, *In Quisling’s Shadow: The Memoirs of Vidkun Quisling’s First Wife, Alexandra*. Trans. by Seaver, Kirsten A. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Edwin McArthur, *Flagstad: A Personal Memoir*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 116-124.

<sup>27</sup> “Kirsten Flagstad Greets Daughter, Norse Refugee.” *New York Herald Tribune*. October 8, 1940, 18A.

<sup>28</sup> McArthur, *Flagstad*, 132.

soprano role in *Tristan und Isolde*. After multiple curtain calls, her Tristan counterpart, the famed tenor Lauritz Melchior, addressed the audience: “Let’s wish her a happy voyage home and a happy return.” Flagstad addressed the ebullient audience simply by saying, “I am very happy to be going home, but I shall be even happier to return to you.”<sup>29</sup>

Kirsten Flagstad made plans to depart from the United States on April 19, 1941, and the details of her itinerary aroused a sense of suspicion from the Norwegian government. Edwin McArthur acknowledges, “it has repeatedly been charged that Flagstad returned to Norway in 1941 through aid she had received from the German embassy,” but “the charge that she traveled on a German passport is incredible.” He further reported that the anti-Quisling Norwegian legation in Washington had no objection to Flagstad returning to Norway “provided she did not cross enemy territory.” As it has been noted, Anne Johansen, Flagstad’s stepdaughter, had arranged entry into the United States via the preferred route through Japan and across the Pacific ocean. Flagstad instead ignored this warning and opted to depart from La Guardia Field (present-day LaGuardia Airport) and fly through Europe. This inevitably meant touching down in Reich territories en route to occupied Norway. Having chosen the route across Europe, “she closed the door to any help” from the Norwegian legation and provoked significant scrutiny from the American public.<sup>30</sup>

This was illustrated when, on the day of Flagstad’s departure, she gave evasive and flippant statements to the American reporters that stoked their suspicion about the singer’s return to occupied Norway. When asked, “Have you made arrangements to get through [Germany]?” she curtly responded, “You see I am on my way. That should show that arrangements are made.” Perhaps she did not understand the public impact of her decision to travel through Third Reich

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<sup>29</sup> “Mme. Flagstad to Visit Her Husband in Norway.” *New York Times*. April 13, 1941, 41; McArthur, *Flagstad*, 145.

<sup>30</sup> McArthur, *Flagstad*, 139-41.

territories, or maybe she felt as if she had nothing to hide. Nevertheless, her tone-deaf responses to reporters' questions showed an insensitivity to the public's growing interest in music's relationship to Nazi politics. "I don't anticipate any trouble in getting into Oslo," Flagstad declared, "But whether the plans go through is in the *laps of the gods*" [italics added].<sup>31</sup> The response evoked Wagnerian mythology, already acutely associated with Nazism. The impact of this statement was clear. Reporters asked Flagstad to clarify her status as an American citizen and clarify her allegiances, but she refused to answer. She only assured reporters that German-occupied Oslo was "not harmed during the German invasion,"<sup>32</sup> seemingly downplaying the impact of Nazi occupation and hinting at support of the Quisling regime. Furthermore, Flagstad's decision to suddenly leave her daughter behind must have discredited her initial portrayal as a caring mother. While abroad, Flagstad even missed Anne's wedding in 1942.<sup>33</sup>

As a result, until the end of the war, Kirsten Flagstad faced *in absentia* mounting public scrutiny and suspicion in the United States as her husband became an increasingly controversial figure. Following her departure, conductor Edwin McArthur describes periods of "blackout" during which Flagstad was unreachable and made no effort to send news from abroad, which fed into "gossip and unpleasant rumors" about the soprano's wartime existence.<sup>34</sup> On June 17, 1941, Henry Johansen gave an interview to the Norwegian press claiming he and Flagstad would not be returning to America.<sup>35</sup> This sent shockwaves through New York City, especially among her former business managers, who expected that she would return the following August and fulfill her commitments to the Metropolitan Opera. *The New York Times* reported how Flagstad "had

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<sup>31</sup> This observation reflects evidence from the introduction relating to music and Wagner as a pillar of Nazi power and prestige.

<sup>32</sup> "Kirsten Flagstad Off For Norway: Opera Star, Aboard Clipper, Expects No Trouble in Trip Through Reich." *The New York Times*. April 20, 1941, 18.

<sup>33</sup> "Anne Johansen Wed; Stepdaughter of Mme. Flagstad." *The New York Herald Tribune*. March 22, 1942, 40.

<sup>34</sup> McArthur, *Flagstad*, 153.

<sup>35</sup> McArthur, *Flagstad*, 148.

numerous contractual arrangements to sing [at the Metropolitan Opera]. [...] It was presumed that some important unforeseen developments must have arisen to cause the singer to change her mind.”<sup>36</sup> Inquiry into these “unforeseen developments” often appeared in press reports about the soprano.<sup>37</sup>

It was not until early 1945 that Flagstad’s media attention exploded after news reached America that Johansen, now known to be a member of the “Norwegian Quisling Nazi puppet party,” had been arrested by the Nazis for “undisclosed reasons.” The German-controlled Scandinavian Telegraph Bureau alleged he joined 5,000 Norwegian nationals imprisoned at the Grini concentration camp in Baerum, Norway.<sup>38</sup> Sympathy devolved into scandal, however, when the Norwegian Embassy in New York City denounced the story as a fraud. *The New York Times* reported that the “arrest of Henry Johansen [...] was described by the Norwegian underground as a ‘face-saving maneuver’” to underplay his relationship with the collaborationist government. This new report alleged that Johansen was taken to the Grini concentration camp “in his own car and by his own chauffeur, who brought him back to Oslo the following day.” The Norwegian Embassy in New York City further accused Johansen of amassing “large sums in his business dealings with the Germans occupying Norway and the [arrest] by the Gestapo was interpreted as an attempt by him to build up ‘an alibi for the day of reckoning.’”<sup>39</sup> After Nazi Germany was defeated in May, 1945, officials in newly liberated Norway detained Johansen for profiteering under the Nazi regime, seemingly confirming the allegations against him.

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<sup>36</sup> “Kirsten Flagstad to Stay in Norway: Decision to Remain Till After the War Surprises Friends Here.” *The New York Times*. June 18, 1941, 24.

<sup>37</sup> “Husband of Kirsten Flagstad Arrested by Nazis in Norway.” *The New York Herald Tribune*. February 16, 1945, 11A.

<sup>38</sup> “Kirsten Flagstad’s Husband Held.” *The New York Times*. February 16, 1945, 7; “Husband of Kirsten Flagstad Arrested by Nazis in Norway.” *The New York Herald Tribune*. February 16, 1945, 11A; “Kirsten Flagstad’s Mate Arrested in Norway.” *The Atlanta Constitution*. February 18, 1945.

<sup>39</sup> “Johnson Arrest Sifted.” *The New York Times*. February 24, 1945, 6.

These controversial developments created an atmosphere of intense hostility toward Flagstad immediately after the end of the European war, and the American public initially showed little sign of expressing any degree of absolution. Flagstad frequently asserted that she “did not sing for Nazi audiences,” adding, “had Germany extended such an invitation I would have refused. I was asked to sing with the Berlin Philharmonic in Stockholm, but refused.”<sup>40</sup> However, a 1933 report from the *New York Herald Tribune* indicated Hitler did in fact attend one of the soprano’s performances at “Nazi Bayreuth,”<sup>41</sup> which inflamed the scandal. Norwegian officials publically renounced Flagstad, and *The Baltimore Sun* printed front-page accusations that Flagstad “was aware of the fact that her husband was a Nazi.” As events further unfolded, even the Metropolitan Opera attempted to distance itself from Flagstad. It released a statement regarding her future employment with the opera company: “The first question to consider is her re-entry into the United States, and that is a matter which rests entirely with Washington. Until [...] her position is clarified, I can see no reason why the Metropolitan should even reconsider the question of her re-engagement.”<sup>42</sup>

In June 1946, Henry Johansen died from pulmonary cancer awaiting trial, and it proved to be a watershed moment in reshaping the American presses’ perspectives about Flagstad. The vitriol of previous reports about her Nazi associations significantly declined, highlighting how attitudes about conventional husband-wife relationship dynamics likely figured into New York City’s opinion of the soprano. Although there were those who thought Flagstad’s marriage to

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<sup>40</sup> “Kirsten Flagstad Plans to Return To America: Metropolitan’s Ex-Star Did Not Sing Before Nazis.” *The New York Herald Tribune*. May 16, 1945, 14A; “Kirsten Flagstad Vows Never to Sing in Norway.” *The Los Angeles Times*. June 10, 1945, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, Max. “Nazi Bayreuth.” *The New York Herald Tribune*. August 13, 1933, D4.

<sup>42</sup> “Kirsten Flagstad Involved in Husband’s ‘Quisling’ Case.” *The Baltimore Sun*. June 15, 1945, 1.

Johansen made her status “questionable, to say the least,”<sup>43</sup> the *New York Herald Tribune* reported that his death “left open the question of whether Miss Flagstad, who has been living in strict privacy in southern Norway, would leave the country.” In July 1946, it was reported Flagstad was “planning a return to [the United States] as soon as she could obtain a visa.”<sup>44</sup> Only a few months after Johansen’s death, the press posed what once seemed a question already answered in the negative: “Will Americans accept Kirsten Flagstad Again?”<sup>45</sup> The opinion of the American press dramatically shifted in a matter of weeks, demonstrating how her husband’s death considerably diminished Flagstad’s perceived connection to the collaborationist Quisling party.

New York City’s public remained divided in their reception of Kirsten Flagstad after Johansen’s death. Never forced to undergo official denazification by Allied occupiers in Europe, Flagstad successfully re-entered the United States in early 1947. She arranged her first New York City performance for April 20, 1947, at Carnegie Hall. Her return was contentious. *The New York Times* reported sixty picketers outside the venue in anticipation of her performance. The protesters, who were mostly members of the theater and musicians chapters of the American Veterans Committee, wielded signs emblazoned with swastikas stating “Let Freedom Sing... Not Flagstad” and “Kirsten Entertained Nazis, We Fought Them!”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hall, David. “For Common Action: Reader Suggests Ways to Solve Problem Of Artists Affected by Politics.” *The New York Times*. April 6, 1947, X9.

<sup>44</sup> “Henry Johansen Dies in Norway; Was Kirsten Flagstad’s Husband.” *New York Herald Tribune*. June 27, 1946, 26A.

<sup>45</sup> “Will Americans Accept Kirsten Flagstad Again?” *The Washington Post*. September 22, 1946, S4.

<sup>46</sup> “Protesting Appearance of Kirsten Flagstad Here.” *The New York Times*. April 21, 1947, 4.





The audience of the sold-out performance, however, warmly greeted Flagstad even before she began her performance. The *New York Herald Tribune*'s review of the concert reported, "When the noted soprano first appeared on the stage most of the hearers rose to greet her and there was a long demonstration of vigorous handclaps [*sic*] and cheers before she began her program with Beethoven's 'Busslied.'" Interestingly, she ended her program with the "Liebestod" aria from Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, which the audience warmly received, despite the fact that Wagner's music had already become ignominious among veterans' and Jewish organizations in New York City.<sup>47</sup> It was a calculated risk. Her somewhat less controversial first postwar American recital on April 11, 1947 at the Chicago Orchestra Hall surprisingly did not include a single Wagner aria.<sup>48</sup> That one of the most famous Wagnerian sopranos in the world chose to de-emphasize Wagner's works in her initial concerts indicated Flagstad's growing appreciation of their implications in the United States' postwar political atmosphere.

<sup>47</sup> "Flagstad Gets Ovation While Pickets March." *New York Herald Tribune*. April 21, 1947, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Flagstad-Cornell project files, \*T-Mss 2010-009. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. Box 4, Folder 9.

In sum, the Flagstad controversy in New York City highlighted some of the crucial issues underscoring the American public's understanding and reception of "Nazi" musicians after the Second World War. Yet her controversy is unique in many ways. The passing of Flagstad's husband significantly diminished journalists' perception of her alleged support for collaborationism and helped the soprano regain the public's sympathies in New York City. Indeed, after Flagstad's death in 1962, a memorial document drafted by Metropolitan Opera conductor and German refugee Bruno Walter described America's slow willingness to embrace the "housewife and mother" condoned by Britain and France, suggesting her return to Norway reflected the fulfillment of a good wife's duties.<sup>49</sup> Overall, Flagstad's scandal in New York City was entangled in Johansen's controversy in Europe.

The Flagstad controversy further illustrated the priorities of American audiences. The New York public, divided as it was across cultural, religious and veteran communities, maintained an appreciation for her musical excellence that overcame political bias and condemnation. Conductor Edwin McArthur quotes a 1945 editorial from *Newsweek* in his memoirs that perhaps best illustrated the salience of this phenomenon:

Apropos the Flagstad Argument (*Newsweek*, June 25) the lady [Flagstad] is a great artist and I for one (a veteran of five campaigns in the European theater) should like to hear her sing again. Her political background and sympathies (her husband is an accused collaborationist) have no bearing on the quality of her voice or enjoyment of it. By all means, let us welcome the singer, Kirsten Flagstad, to our concert halls.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Flagstad-Cornell project files, \*T-Mss 2010-009. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. Box 4, Folder 7.

<sup>50</sup> McArthur, *Flagstad*, 164.

While Flagstad was indeed welcomed back to New York City's concert halls, the next case study of Walter Giesecking demonstrates how the debate over German music and politics was far from resolved.

## CHAPTER 3

Walter Giesecking:

*“You’re Uninvited, an Unfortunate Slight.” — Alanis Morissette*

Like Kirsten Flagstad, pianist Walter Giesecking faced enormous scrutiny in the United States during the postwar period. The announcement in January 1949 that Giesecking had acquired a passport visa for his first postwar American tour set in motion a heated scandal in New York City that resonated nationwide. It ultimately led to the pianist’s *de facto* deportation before he could play a single note.<sup>51</sup> This chapter will trace the trajectory of Giesecking’s first attempt to concertize in postwar America. The following question will be addressed: Why was the outcome of Walter Giesecking’s controversy in the United States so drastically different from Kirsten Flagstad’s, two years *after* her acclaimed return to Carnegie Hall? Giesecking’s scandal in New York City illuminated America’s deep bias against native German musicians. It also illustrated the growing political power of energized interest groups that exerted influence over a fragmented constellation of governmental agencies. Furthermore, his own conviction that an artist had no responsibility to politics strongly guided his stoic public responses to the accusations he faced, which fomented the public’s furor.

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Despite Giesecking’s removal from the Allied blacklist in February 1947, the New York City press mercilessly scrutinized the pianist after it was reported in late 1948 that Giesecking was planning his first postwar U.S. tour starting in January 1949. Delbert Clark, writing from Berlin, published the scathing editorial “Giesecking, Pro and Con,” chronicling the artist’s alleged Nazi record in the *New York Times*. Quoting his denazification interviews, Clark asserted Giesecking

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<sup>51</sup> “Walter Giesecking Gets Visa for Tour.” *New York Herald Tribune*. January 22, 1949, 9.

“excused and justified Hitler and Hitlerism and said he believed in Hitler’s new order. He said he saw no fundamental principle at stake in the war ‘except perhaps anti-communism.’” Such a response indicated Giesecking’s lack of appreciation of the American perception of Nazism and its consequences. Or perhaps it was the mark of arrogance. Nevertheless, Clark accused Giesecking of performing concerts “arranged by Goebbels’ staff” for Nazi audiences throughout Hitler’s rule, and was “in great demand with the Propaganda Ministry for concerts in occupied countries.” He further asserted Giesecking’s concert repertoire fluctuated with the changing tides of the war: “Between 1939 and 1941 he packed his programs with Russian music, never before a feature of his playing, and then dropped it abruptly after June 22, 1941,” referencing the commencement of Operation Barbarossa, in which the Wehrmacht invaded the U.S.S.R and renounced the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact. Clark also noted that during “the Nazi regime Giesecking’s income greatly increased. In 1935 it was 84,500 marks, but by 1942 it was 144,000 marks and the following year 108,000.”<sup>52</sup>

Almost three weeks later, the *Times* received and published a letter to the editor countering Delbert Clark’s invective, and it illustrated how musical elites felt about musicians’ responsibilities to politics. Meyer Kurz, the letter’s writer who identified himself as “Giesecking’s friend, attorney and admirer since his first American tour,” attempted to unravel Clark’s report. Kurz pointedly wrote, “From the fact that reasons for the blacklisting were given but that reasons for the clearance were omitted Mr. Clark implies that something caused a reversal of policy that was not entirely on the merits.” Kurz’s rebuttal was most convincing when he cited the disorganized nature of denazification. He wrote, “The truth is that Giesecking was never informed of his blacklisting officially [...] and that he was never given a chance to defend himself or refute the charges, though his interrogator had specifically recommended at the time that he be

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<sup>52</sup> Clark, Delbert. “A Review of Giesecking’s Record Since 1934.” *New York Times*. February 8, 1948, X7.

allowed to play.” Ironically, the public perception that denazification was a disorganized, incoherent process was employed to both defend and denigrate German artists. Kurz also noted that Clark “didn’t take the trouble to visit Giesecking at Wiesbaden [Giesecking’s residence]” and give him an opportunity to defend himself. “Mr. Clark would, I am sure, have gotten an impression of the man totally different from that his article conveys.”<sup>53</sup>

Kurz’s rebuttal demonstrated a clear bias, however, when he attempted to create sympathetic arguments for Giesecking’s situation in 1939. He denied that Giesecking refused to flee as a refugee when the Second World War began. “I worked closely with Giesecking’s manager at the time,” Kurz writes, “and I know that he wanted more than anything else to come to America for a sixty-date tour beginning January, 1940.” No evidence supports this claim. Furthermore, Kurz cited family troubles that tied Giesecking to Germany, though the pianist “did not invoke any of them” in his defense.<sup>54</sup> As controversy swirled around the pianist, Giesecking’s prideful silence proved increasingly problematic as he refused to respond to his accusers in the press. This silence fueled suspicions about the extent to which he had cooperated with the Nazi state.

These developments greatly hampered the pianist’s touring efforts in the United States in 1948. On April 18, *The Washington Post* announced that the D.C.-based National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) had cancelled Giesecking’s engagement for its upcoming season. Paul Hume reported, “This cleared up a question which had been bothering a number of Washingtonians who wondered who would conduct for Giesecking if he came here.” Hans Kindler, a Dutch expat

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<sup>53</sup> Kurz, Meyer. “From the Mail Pouch: Giesecking, Pro and Con.” *The New York Times*. February 29, 1948, X7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

who founded the NSO, announced “he will never again direct a concert at which Giesecking plays.”<sup>55</sup>

During the controversy over his NSO engagement, the American Veterans Committee (AVC) emerged as key opponents to Giesecking. They led the opposition against his 1948 NSO performance, and “circulated an account of his wartime career across the country,” describing him as an “unrepentant Nazi.” In response, Giesecking was quoted as declaring, “I am an artist. All I want to do is play the piano.” His defenders argued his artistic stature might warrant evaluating him in a different light:

No competent observer denies that Walter Giesecking, now 53, is one of the world’s greatest artists. [...] His absence from American concert halls would deprive the musical public of one of the few giants of the piano today. The philosophical problem of the man as an artist versus the whole man is a matter for extended debate.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, for Giesecking, this philosophical debate remained protracted and stagnant so long as he refused to make a significant effort to redeem himself in American opinion.

Shortly after the announcement that Giesecking would return for a recital at Carnegie Hall in January 1949, *The New York Times*’ Delbert Clark printed a slew of letters from 1933 between the pianist and leadership at the Militant League for German Culture. Clark interpreted Giesecking’s interest in joining the Militant League as allegiance to a Nazi “party auxiliary.”<sup>57</sup> Although the pianist never joined the Nazi Party or the Militant League, the article forcefully reasserted that Giesecking significantly profited under Nazi rule. This contradicted the Hessian Ministry for Political Liberation’s announcement on January 18, 1947 that because Giesecking was not a party member he would not be required to account for his actions before a

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<sup>55</sup> Hume, Paul. “Nazi Overtone: Giesecking’s Engagement is Canceled.” *The Washington Post*. April 18, 1948, C4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Delbert Clark, “Giesecking Letters: They Reveal His Efforts to Join Nazi Group.” *The New York Times*. January 9, 1949, X7.

denazification tribunal,<sup>58</sup> a decision that likely contributed to increased distrust of Giesecking and German-led denazification efforts.

The AVC continued to play an increasingly powerful role in New York City, leading public protests against Giesecking's attempts to perform in the United States. In response to the announcement of Giesecking's 1949 tour, they picketed its main organizers. At the same time the AVC was protesting Giesecking's performance in Washington D.C., the New York City musicians' chapter of the organization picketed the offices of Charles L. Wagner, Giesecking's American concert manager. They wielded "placards denouncing Herr Giesecking as 'Hitler's musical educator,' and Mr. Wagner as 'New management for Nazi artists.'" Wagner staunchly defended himself and Giesecking, stating, "If I thought that Walter Giesecking had the faintest tint of Nazism, I'd say no to the tour. I've known him since 1925. [...] [H]e is the most unpolitical [*sic*] man I've ever known."<sup>59</sup> This reflected a consistent pattern characterizing Giesecking's postwar career. The pianist's colleagues, once drawn into controversy, were forced to defend him and themselves, while Giesecking's refusal to speak at length to the press strengthened the AVC's position throughout 1948.<sup>60</sup> Their expressions of "Civic Pride" came to define the efforts to exclude musicians like Giesecking from performing in American cities.<sup>61</sup>

The political atmosphere among New York City's divided audiences reached a fever pitch in January 1949 as a result of these developments. Although Giesecking's visa to the United States was "held up" by Jewish and veterans' interest groups, including the AVC and

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<sup>58</sup> David Monod, *Settling Scores*, 158-159.

<sup>59</sup> "AVC Units Protest Tour By Giesecking: Veterans Picket C.L. Wagner Office to Oppose Projected Concerts by German." *The New York Times*. April 20, 1948, 32.

<sup>60</sup> "Carnegie Hall Picketed: AVC Group Protests Flagstad and Giesecking Recitals." *The New York Times*. December 8, 1948, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Taubman, Howard. "Value of Civic Pride: Cities in West Support Musical Groups With Unified, Enthusiastic Spirit." *The New York Times*. May 9, 1948, X7.



Democratic Representative of New York Arthur G. Klein,<sup>62</sup> it was announced on January 22, 1949 that the U.S. State Department authorized a passport visa allowing the pianist to tour the United States. State Department press officer Michael J. McDermott recognized that “there were protests and charges that Mr. Giesecking had played at concerts attended by Adolf Hitler. The State Department decided nevertheless there was nothing in the pianist’s record which under existing statutes would require that he be excluded.”<sup>63</sup> This statement evoked the idea that denazification was potentially incomplete in its statutes, adding to the problematic reputation of musical denazification. However, although his performance “was still opposed by a half-dozen organizations which charged Mr. Giesecking with Nazi sympathies,” his postwar premiere at Carnegie Hall on January 24 was sold out.<sup>64</sup> This indicated the continued support of German musicians among elite audiences amid the polarization of opinion in New York City. Despite public furor over Giesecking’s return, it appeared the State Department had finalized its decision and Giesecking would be permitted to return.

As Giesecking prepared to land in New York City on January 23, 1949, the growing number of picketing groups, including the AVC, the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, the Jewish War Veterans and the American Jewish Congress, ramped up their protests and proved immensely influential.<sup>65</sup> That day, Rep. Arthur Klein continued to fight Giesecking’s entry into the U.S., stating “I can find no excuse for Government officials willing to help bring our national enemies into this country for a repetition of the dreary ‘poor Germany’ campaigns of the 1920s.” Klein further announced he was pressuring the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to

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<sup>62</sup> “Giesecking Visa Held Up: Veterans Groups Oppose Pianist Entry to U.S. as Ex- Nazi.” *New York Herald Tribune*. January 17, 1949, 14.

<sup>63</sup> “Walter Giesecking Gets Visa for Tour.” *New York Herald Tribune*. January 22, 1949, 9.

<sup>64</sup> “Giesecking Here for Recital, Still Called Pro-Nazi.” *New York Herald Tribune*. January 23, 1949, 47.

<sup>65</sup> “Giesecking Here for Recital, Still Called Pro-Nazi.” *New York Herald Tribune*. January 23, 1949, 47.

reconsider Giesecking's visa. As a result, the INS organized a hearing in New York the next day.<sup>66</sup>

While public furor gained political currency, the actors involved in organizing Giesecking's performance attempted to further extricate themselves from the controversy. Despite the fact Giesecking's concert was fully booked, Carnegie Hall's President Robert E. Simon, Jr. issued a statement reflecting the public pressure against the pianist's appearance. On January 23, he placed responsibility for the booking on Giesecking's manager, C. L. Wagner, and on governmental discretion. He told the *New York Herald Tribune*, "While Carnegie Hall is a privately owned property, we have always considered ourselves a quasi-public institution in the sense that we do not exercise censorship of events except at the direction of governmental agencies designated to protect the community." Giesecking, too, finally broke his silence to the press, making more explicit, detailed denials of his involvements with the Nazi party. When his Air France flight touched down in Queens, N.Y., he made a statement to the press, asserting, "I was not a member of the [Militant League for German Culture], which was abolished in 1933. The only appearance I made before Adolf Hitler was at a public concert in Berlin in 1936. I never played privately for any Nazi official, and I only met Goebbels once—at a reception for German musicians."<sup>67</sup>

On January 24, in a stunning reversal of the State Department's original determinations, the INS opened a new inquiry into Walter Giesecking's Nazi ties and detained him. The Justice Department cancelled the pianist's debut recital two hours before curtain time, even as most of his audience had already begun to arrive at Carnegie Hall.<sup>68</sup> The INS arrested and interrogated

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<sup>66</sup> "Congressman Fights Entry of Giesecking." *The Baltimore Sun*. January 24, 1949, 3.

<sup>67</sup> "Giesecking Here for Recital, Still Called Pro-Nazi." *New York Herald Tribune*. January 23, 1949, 47.

<sup>68</sup> "Giesecking Taken Into Custody; Carnegie Recital, U.S. Tour Off." *New York Herald Tribune*. January 25, 1949, 1.

Giesecking overnight, holding a “preliminary investigation of charges that the pianist had a pro-Nazi record [...] even though a visa, approved by the State Department” had already been issued. The INS claimed to have confronted Giesecking with “newly discovered documentary evidence”<sup>69</sup> that required a “formal hearing on whether the pianist should be deported as an ‘undesirable alien.’” The hearing was cancelled when Giesecking chose to willingly leave the United States on January 25.<sup>70</sup> That day, he arrived at the New York International Airport in Idlewild, Queens, escorted by his attorney and two INS inspectors. Immigration officials claimed the charges against Giesecking, “which [although] were not revealed, were ‘read into the record,’” and Giesecking “‘showed no desire to refute them and no will to appeal.’” Reporters at the scene asked Giesecking, “If, as you say, you were never a Nazi, why do you not stay here and fight the exclusion?” The pianist’s pride was on full display when he bitterly responded, “No, it would take two or three months to fight it, and I did not want to go to Ellis Island. I’m disgusted.”<sup>71</sup> His response confirmed the stark divide between musicians’ and the presses’ understanding of music’s political implications.

The Giesecking scandal in New York City can best be historicized as an ordeal involving a deeply polarized public, an equally disjointed government effort, and the poor management of his public profile. That his Carnegie Hall recital, which held an occupancy of 2,760 seats, was sold out points to a continued appreciation for the pianist’s musical eminence among New York’s cultural elites. Although press reports omit specific numbers, picketers appear to have been small in number, yet the protest generated by this minority of interest groups ultimately outweighed his musical popularity. Moreover, reflecting the disorganized nature of American denazification in Germany, different governmental bodies responded in different ways to

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<sup>69</sup> “Giesecking, Off to Paris, Bitter Over Treatment.” *New York Herald Tribune*. January 26, 1949, 19.

<sup>70</sup> “Giesecking Agrees to Quit U.S. Without Giving Concert Here.” *The New York Times*. January 25, 1949, 1.

<sup>71</sup> “Giesecking, Off to Paris, Bitter Over Treatment.” *New York Herald Tribune*. January 26, 1949, 19.

Giesecking's return to the U.S. The State Department issued Giesecking a visa from Berlin, and it was only as protests gained momentum in New York that the Justice Department and INS gave in to public pressure and intervened to cancel the pianist's tour. Notably, it was political pressure from these very protest groups that originally influenced Major General McClure's hard line against musicians in occupied Germany. Giesecking's deportation illustrated the continuity of this influence.

Despite Jewish interest groups' motivated efforts to expel Giesecking from the U.S., divergent opinions and reports make it difficult to measure the majority opinion of New York City's Jewish population on the whole. The *American Israelite* issued a report on the Giesecking scandal on February 3, 1949, responding to an editorial in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* that likened the affair to the workings of a "police state." The *Israelite* pointedly remarked, "If Giesecking has a good case, why did he cancel a lucrative professional contract and why did he quit our shores so quickly? [...] **Why does Mr. Giesecking desire no hearing?** [*sic*]"<sup>72</sup> The report referenced Delbert Clark's claims concerning Giesecking's alleged involvement in the Militant League of German Culture. The *Israelite* also, however, published dissenting opinions. In one instance, editorialist Alfred Segal satirically wrote:

To kick the piano player for the sake of six million lives wasn't like us—this tragic people who should be standing in height with the everlasting mountains. Oh, we helped to toss out of the country the piano-player who used to play for the Nazis. We have taken from him all the profits he would have derived from his concerts. The six million dead are avenged!  
It was too ridiculous.<sup>73</sup>

Significantly, the editors of *The American Israelite* issued a statement *in the same issue* reiterating their endorsed attitude toward Giesecking, which perhaps indicates the majority of its

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<sup>72</sup> "Giesecking, Communism and Fascism." *The American Israelite*. February 3, 1949, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Segal, Alfred. "Plain Talk." *The American Israelite*. February 17, 1949, 1.

readers did not share Segal's views. They reasserted that Giesecking "bet on the 'wrong horse.'" He was an important individual among those men and women [...] who chose to stay and profit under the Nazi regime while the Thomas Manns [*sic*] chose exile."<sup>74</sup>

This scandal also resulted from a complete public relations failure. Two years earlier, Flagstad had been able to re-enter the U.S. and concertize despite public protests, in part because she repositioned herself as a recognizable and sympathetic character in the American press. Giesecking's silence in response to the charges levied against him undoubtedly hindered his performing efforts and tainted his reputation.

Historian David Monod critiqued German musicians' attempts to invoke close relationships with Jews in Germany as shields against charges of Nazism.<sup>75</sup> The memoir of Giesecking's protégé Marian Filar, a Polish national who survived the horrors of the Buchenwald concentration camp, indicates Giesecking's own refusal to take such a stance. After his scandal in New York City, when Filar once arrived at Giesecking's villa for a lesson, a German press corps harangued him and Giesecking, who characteristically avoided their questions. Filar observed Giesecking's passive response, writing:

I smiled, and then all of a sudden the German press people began to focus on me. "Who is this?" one asked. Giesecking could have used me beautifully: "Oh, he's a Jewish fellow who survived Buchenwald, and he's my favorite student," or some such thing. And I *was* his favorite student. Instead, he just said simply that I was one of his students and was there to have my lesson.<sup>76</sup>

Stories such as this significantly undermine the way in which Monod and the American press presented Giesecking to the American public. Had Giesecking shown a greater willingness to

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<sup>74</sup> "Political Opinion Not the Issue." *The American Israelite*. February 17, 1949, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Monod, *Settling Scores*, 87-89.

<sup>76</sup> Marian Filar and Charles Patterson, *From Buchenwald to Carnegie Hall*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 162.

address the charged political atmosphere that had overtaken the U.S., he may well have prevented the unfortunate and dramatic outcome of his arrival in New York.

In the aftermath of Giesecking's departure, debate continued as to whether or not the U.S.'s actions represented intolerance or justifiable deportation. Significantly, on July 25, 1950, Congress opened a special investigation into the actions of the INS concerning Giesecking, pointing to an official awareness of the incoherent actions of the different governmental agencies.<sup>77</sup> The controversy arguably contributed to the enactment of the McCarran-Walter Act, otherwise known as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, according to which sympathy with or membership in the Nazi party no longer constituted a basis for exclusion from the United States.<sup>78</sup> With the passing of this law Giesecking was finally able to reenter the U.S. and perform at Carnegie Hall on April 22, 1953. Even then, it was not without controversy, and the third case to be studied in the following chapter illustrates the enduring tensions surrounding German musicians in this time period.

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<sup>77</sup> 81 S. Resolution 320 Introduced In Senate. July 25, 1950. 81<sup>st</sup> Congress, Second Session. Accessed online, September 28, 2015.

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<sup>78</sup> "Giesecking Entry Assailed: Jewish Congress Asks Change in McCarran Act Rules." *The New York Times*. April 4, 1953, 15.

## CHAPTER 4

Wilhelm Furtwängler:

*“Long After the War has Ended, We’re Still in Fatigues.” – Pet Shop Boys*

Despite an arduous denazification trial, in which American officials and worldwide presses excruciatingly scrutinized his Nazi ties, Furtwängler was exonerated and retained his permanent directorship of the Berlin Philharmonic until his death in 1954. While under his leadership, however, the Berlin Philharmonic was never invited to perform in the United States after the war. This chapter will illustrate how protracted opposition to Furtwängler forced him to withdraw his contract as a guest conductor with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1949. It will further demonstrate that Furtwängler’s highly sensationalized postwar troubles grossly and unfairly damaged his reputation in the United States despite significant historical evidence indicating his opposition to Nazi ideologies. The discrimination against Furtwängler, who was far more engaging with the American press and went to great lengths to redeem himself, demonstrated the American public’s rigid and polarized understandings of the relationship between German musicians and Nazi politics.

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When the Nazi regime began implementing its anti-Semitic policies among Germany’s leading orchestras, Furtwängler took bold stances against them that were forgotten in postwar debates about his culpability as a Nazi supporter. On April 10, 1933, Furtwängler published an open letter denouncing anti-Semitism in the arts in his characteristically arrogant style, declaring:

Ultimately there is only one dividing line I recognize: that between good and bad art. However, while the dividing line between Jews and non-Jews is being drawn with a downright merciless theoretical precision, that other dividing line, the one which in the long run is so

important for our music life, yes, the decisive dividing line between good and bad, seems to have far too little significance attributed to it. [...] If the fight against Judaism concentrates on those artists who are themselves rootless and destructive and who seek to succeed in kitsch, sterile virtuosity and the like, then it is quite acceptable; [...] If, however, this campaign is also directed at truly great artists, then it ceases to be in the interests of Germany's cultural life[.]<sup>79</sup>

For today's readers, Furtwängler's statements might not constitute a complete disavowal of anti-Semitism, but the violent extent to which Hitler would carry out his racist ideologies could not have been imagined at this point. Furtwängler's open letter was nevertheless potent enough to agitate party leadership. Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels responded to Furtwängler by reiterating the racist political implications of ideal Nazi art, creating an ideological binary between the two figures:

Art and artists are not there only to unite; their far more important task is to [...] make room for the healthy to develop. As a German politician I therefore cannot recognize the dividing line you [Furtwängler] hold to be the only one [...] it must also be conditioned by the exigencies of the people [...] and mean something for the people to whom it is directed.<sup>80</sup>

The ongoing feud between Furtwängler and Hitler's inner circle would later be a threat to his life. As the war entered its *dénouement* and German defeat was all but assured, leading Nazi architect Albert Speer felt Furtwängler was in danger and urged him not to return to Germany after his last concert tour in December 1944.<sup>81</sup>

Before the U.S. entered the Second World War, the American press reported about occasions of Furtwängler's opposition to Nazi leaders. On March 10, 1940, *The Washington Post* stated Furtwängler was "again in Nazi favor," although "Furtwängler<sup>82</sup> did not always see eye to

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<sup>79</sup> Fred K. Prieberg, *Trial of Strength: Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Third Reich* (London: Quartet, 1991), 340.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Morrison, *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Paul de Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 49.

<sup>81</sup> Albert Speer, *Inside The Third Reich* (New York: MacMillan, 1970), 462-463.

<sup>82</sup> For the sake of consistency, Furtwängler's native German spelling will be used throughout this chapter, although press reports often used the spelling "Furtwaengler."



eye with Nazidom's top men." It further reported that Furtwängler twice resigned from his role as leader of "Vienna's musical life" in protest of Nazi ideologies.<sup>83</sup> The Viennese conductor Erich Kleiber, Furtwängler's colleague in Germany, also provided an interview with *The New York Times* in which he described Furtwängler's 1936 resignation in response to Hitler's musical controls: "I said to him, 'It is out of the question that we two leading musicians continue to participate in this unfree exercise of our art.['] Furtwängler agreed.'"<sup>84</sup>

Such evidence of Furtwängler's resistance to the Nazi regime was soon overshadowed by the more punitive attitude of European wartime presses. Although Furtwängler avoided further scrutiny in the U.S. until after its entry into the war, American press reports began to bear a closer resemblance to Europe's suspicious outlook. For example, on March 10, 1940, *The Manchester Guardian* called Furtwängler a "Nazi musician" whose programs were "carefully chosen to represent the spirit of Nazi Germany." It further positioned literature, music and film as bearing the "stamp of the ruling spirit in Germany" against which "Britain could strike back."<sup>85</sup> Beginning in 1943, American presses similarly branded Furtwängler as a Nazi "aid" as Germany manipulated the conductor into a symbol of German music propaganda. On a Berlin radio broadcast that year, Furtwängler stated, "no people and no country could overhear and refuse to listen to the mighty language of German music."<sup>86</sup> Reports further alleged a mutually beneficial relationship between Furtwängler and Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels as

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<sup>83</sup> "Furtwaengler Again in Nazi Favor." *The Washington Post*. March 10, 1940, B6.

<sup>84</sup> "Inside Story: Kleiber Reveals Some Details of His and Furtwaengler's Dealings With Nazis." *The New York Times*. April 18, 1943, X7.

<sup>85</sup> "German 'Cultural' Propaganda in the Small Neutral Countries." *The Manchester Guardian*. March 25, 1940, 6.

<sup>86</sup> "Furtwaengler Aids Nazis." *The New York Herald Tribune*. February 23, 1943, 17A.

he conducted for German bombing victims and Nazis soldiers.<sup>87</sup> Such sentiments came to define his perceived role in the Nazi Party.

Following the end of the war, Furtwängler's reputation among prominent Jewish musical and government elites was highly disputed. On December 5, 1945, Yehudi Menuhin, a New York City-born violinist of Belorussian Jewish descent, publically asked "that the Allied world accept Wilhelm Furtwängler [...] into its good graces again." He further stated:

If there is one musician who deserves to be reinstated it is Furtwängler. In all the time he directed in Berlin, he refused to give the Nazi salute at concerts, as was expected of other conductors. And it is well known that he held on to the Jewish members of his orchestra as long as he possibly could. [...] He never allowed himself to be used as a propaganda vehicle in occupied countries. He did not accompany the Berlin orchestras on their tours. When you are a citizen of a country, as he was, his [level of] opposition was all one could expect.<sup>88</sup>

Others were far more critical. In an answer to Menuhin's "plan to forgive" Furtwängler, Ira A. Hirschmann, president and founder of the New Friends of Music, and a former official of the State Department and the War Refugee Board, stated the conductor will be met by "highly organized resistance and opposition." He labeled the conductor as "an official of the Third Reich" and "a Nazi," claiming, "American musical life can flourish without Furtwängler."<sup>89</sup>

Beginning in 1946, Allied denazifiers in Europe showed similarly divergent views toward Furtwängler. On February 17, the *New York Herald Tribune* reported that Ernst Reuter, the Mayor of Berlin and a repatriated German refugee, and other "leading German artists" invited Furtwängler to return to Berlin and "help direct Berlin's cultural revival." The invitation

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<sup>87</sup> "Fewer Heil Hitler, Reich Paper Says: Furtwaengler Now Conducting for Nazis, Troops and the Victims of Bombings." *The New York Times*. February 21, 1944, 6.

<sup>88</sup> "Menuhin Calls on Allied World to Accept Fuertwaengler [sic] Again; Cites Snubs to Nazis." *The New York Times*. December 5, 1945, 26.

<sup>89</sup> "Furtwaengler Called Trusted Friend of Nazis: Ira Hirschmann Denounces Menuhin Plan to Forgive Berlin Music Conductor." *The New York Herald Tribune*. December 11, 1945, 23A.

appeared in an open letter in the *Berliner Zeitung*, the official newspaper of the Berlin administration. It caused a “sensation” among the Allies and underscored early Cold War tensions between the United States and Russia. “The Russians, according to Communist officials, feel that Furtwängler’s relations with the Nazis were not important enough to blacklist him, in view of his artistic ability,” the open letter stipulated, carefully pointing out that “he was not a member of the Nazi party.” American officials, however, felt compelled to blacklist him because he acted as vice-president of the Nazi Reich Culture Chamber. More importantly, Marguerite Higgins, reporting for the *New York Herald Tribune*, hoped to undermine the validity of the open letter by selectively citing its signatories. She listed an unnamed “leading Communist” in Berlin, other former Berlin Philharmonic directors, and Johannes Becher, president of the Kultur Bund (Cultural Society) as Furtwängler’s supporters. Such figures would have scarcely appealed to the American public’s sympathies in the postwar period as Cold War tensions took shape and Germany’s musical culture became increasingly linked to Nazism.<sup>90</sup>

Berlin’s open letter also inspired a more public debate in the United States over how to identify a Nazi collaborator among the many musicians who performed during the Third Reich. The letter supported Menuhin’s claims that Furtwängler took a “moral stand” during the Nazi regime in its early years of leadership, “protest[ing] the boycott of Jewish artists” such as conductor Bruno Walter and composer Paul Hindemith. *The Christian Science Monitor* observed how the open letter illuminated the complex “problem of collaboration.” It indicated “that the leading [elites] of Berlin today considers the interpretation given by British and American occupying authorities (but not in practice by the Russians) may prove too oversimplified.”<sup>91</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup> Marguerite Higgins, “Berlin Invites Furtwaengler to Resume Role.” *The New York Herald Tribune*. February 17, 1946, 16.

<sup>91</sup> J. Emlyn Williams, “Furtwängler Case Debated: What Is a Nazi Collaborator?” *The Christian Science Monitor*. February 19, 1946, 16.

open letter, and the Allies' response to it, symbolized the persistent question of whether or not Germans could be trusted to rehabilitate its musical culture and whether music was an apolitical art form.

Despite the Soviet Union's more inclusive attitude toward German musicians, American occupiers were determined to oust Furtwängler from Berlin's musical life as debate surrounding the conductor persisted. On February 8, 1946, French forces arrested Furtwängler as he attempted to enter Austria after having been expelled from Switzerland amid the growing controversy. While Furtwängler was held in custody, Brigadier General Robert A. McClure prohibited him from returning to Berlin and publically branded the conductor as a "tool" of the Nazi party. In a report to *The New York Times* McClure declared, "It is inconceivable he should be allowed to occupy a leading position in Germany at the time when we are attempting to wipe out every trace of nazism [*sic*]." He emphasized Furtwängler's association with the Reich Music Chamber as irrefutable evidence of the conductor's Nazi sympathies.<sup>92</sup> He later reasserted his position after reviewing the "instances of the conductor's original anti-Nazi stand." He argued that Furtwängler "agreed to make a public apology to Adolf Hitler and in consequence issued a statement in 1935 acknowledging the latter as the sole ruler of German art. He thereupon proceeded to cash in on his reputation and made numerous appearances under Nazi auspices[.]" However, McClure's statements were problematic. By 1946, Hitler's tyrannical rule was widely known among the Allied countries, especially among military leaders. McClure's assumption that Furtwängler was not compelled to apologize defied this common understanding of Nazi Germany.

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<sup>92</sup> "Furtwaengler Branded 'Tool' of Nazis; His Return to Berlin Is Not Permitted." *The New York Times*. February 21, 1946, 6.

Despite McClure's public attacks against the conductor and America's increasing hostility, Furtwängler found continued support among Germany's cultural elites. Friedelind Wagner, granddaughter of the composer Richard Wagner, who fled to England before the war in opposition to Nazism, called the conductor a "weak person," but said he "had always opposed nazism [*sic*]." She recalled, "I remember Hitler turning to Furtwängler and telling him that he would have to allow himself to be used by the party for propaganda purposes. [...] And I remember Furtwängler refusing."<sup>93</sup> Statements such as these by Wagner and McClure, made public during the height of denazification, further illustrated the scope of the division of opinion about denazification's efficacy and its consequences for Furtwängler.

On December 20, 1946, denazifiers exonerated Furtwängler for his alleged Nazi associations, but his stigma endured as the American press continued its inquiries into Furtwängler's past. This was highlighted by a controversy that year surrounding his young rival conductor Herbert von Karajan. *New York Times* reporter Delbert Clark accused Furtwängler of having relied upon his "intimacy" with the Ministry of Propaganda "to procure punishment for a Berlin critic who dared praise Herbert von Karajan [...] at [Furtwängler's] expense." a charge that goes against earlier demonstrated evidence that Goebbels and Furtwängler were at odds. Although Furtwängler had asserted in his defense that Goering masterminded this campaign against critic Edwin von der Nüll, Clark tersely questioned whether Furtwängler was in fact "a very powerful man who desired to suppress all opposition, however legitimate[.]"<sup>94</sup>

William E. Ringer, who served as chief of the Security Section of Counter Intelligence in Austria, wrote to the *Times* in response to Clark's article and undermined its claims. He asserted Furtwängler was "undoubtedly the best [conductor] in Germany or Austria" and it could never be

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<sup>93</sup> "McClure Explains Allies' Boycott of Furtwaengler as Conductor: Musician Offered Services to Goebbels After Dismissal for Opposing Nazism, American General Says." *The New York Times*. February 22, 1946, 6.

<sup>94</sup> Delbert Clark. "Furtwaengler's Standards on Trial in Berlin." *The New York Times*. December 29, 1946, 45.

determined that he joined the Nazi Party. Meanwhile, he stated von Karajan “is the more notorious Nazi” and “joined the Party when he was under no compulsion so to do.”<sup>95</sup> Despite such facts, Clark’s continued invectives against Furtwängler influenced the narrative and suspicion the American public attributed to the conductor and more generally to denazification. Although “positive Nazi activity is punishable under the rules of these tribunals,” Clark wrote, “lack of moral sense is not yet a crime.” In Clark’s view, Furtwängler’s “lack of moral sense” rendered him guilty enough.<sup>96</sup> Into the early months of 1947, Clark would continue to bely Furtwängler’s exoneration, which he asserted was the consequence of U.S. Lieutenant General Lucius D. Clay’s decision to allow dubious German courts to judge cultural elites in Germany.<sup>97</sup>

In 1947, with the de-escalation of denazification and the end of the Nuremberg Trials, discourse surrounding German musicians took a philosophical turn. Alfred Segal of *The American Israelite* asked his readers, “What should a Jew think about Germans?” He applauded the violinist Yehudi Menuhin for performing before an “all-German audience and in a charity concert which the de-Nazified conductor, Furtwängler, directed.” Segal reported how Menuhin had given a speech to Jews displaced by the war, during which he stated, “You are truly the victims of Nazism, but the tragedy is that you have grown to be like the Nazis. You make your judgments on a racial basis and you demand that art and music be harnessed to the cause of hate. Love and not hate will heal the world.”<sup>98</sup> David Hall, a music industry professional, similarly pondered the philosophical nature of music with respect to politics in a letter to the music editor of the *New York Times*. He stated he was

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<sup>95</sup> Ringer, William E. “Mail Pouch: Furtwaengler and Karajan.” *The New York Times*. January 5, 1947, X7.

<sup>96</sup> Delbert Clark. “Furtwaengler’s Standards on Trial in Berlin.” *The New York Times*. December 29, 1946, 45.

<sup>97</sup> Delbert Clark. “Nazi Artists Left to German Courts: Clay Orders end of reviews of Hearings Conducted by Tribunals.” *The New York Times*. February 2, 1947, 26.

<sup>98</sup> Segal, Alfred. “Plain Talk: Aileen and Walter.” *The American Israelite*. December 18, 1947, 1.

concerned with the question of what is to be done with ‘enemy’ or ‘collaborationist’ artists. Some of the finest recordings in the entire literature have been made by artists like Wilhelm Furtwängler, [...] Should those who have proved themselves irresponsible as citizens be allowed to take their place in the international music world alongside those artists who [...] have refused to have any truck with Nazis and Fascists?

Although his suggestion that the United Nations play an active role in directing the careers of musicians “tainted at one time or another with the Nazi-Fascist brush” seemed farfetched,<sup>99</sup> such articles indicated a growing uneasiness among New York City intellectuals about whether or not an attitude of exclusion ought to be leading the debate over controversial musicians. In either case, such attitudes were easier to accept when the questions surrounding the most controversial German musicians remained a distant, invisible entity.

This changed in January 1949, when, at the same time Walter Giesecking was ready to begin his U.S. tour, Furtwängler became the center of a similar maelstrom that aroused support and opposition from around the world. The Chicago Philharmonic Orchestra invited Furtwängler to perform as a guest conductor for their upcoming season, which itself illustrated the orchestra’s support of Furtwängler. Violinist Yehudi Menuhin renewed his calls to welcome the conductor. The Berlin Philharmonic also boldly defended their director, stating, “We members of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra know [...] more exactly than outsiders what Furtwängler’s attitude has been in the long years of our co-operation.” However, several of the world’s most eminent Jewish classical musicians—including violinist Isaac Stern and pianists Artur Schnabel and Vladimir Horowitz—announced they would “refuse to appear under Herr Furtwängler if the Chicago Symphony hire[d] him as a conductor.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Hall, David. “For Common Action: Reader Suggests Ways to Solve Problem Of Artists Affected by Politics.” *The New York Times*. April 6, 1947, X9.

<sup>100</sup> “German Conductor Answers Critics of Chicago Invitation: Conductor Defended.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. January 12, 1949, 10

Like Giesecking, Furtwängler answered his critics by attempting to position himself outside the arena of politics; unlike the pianist, he was much more vocal in the press. “Everyone must bear the fate to which he is bound by ties of an age, a race, or a nation,” he stated, “I am a German, born on German soil. As a musician I have to fulfill the tasks of that country.” Such lofty claims failed to quell the uproar over the contract. James C. Petrillo, who at the time was the President of the American Federation of Musicians (AFL), announced “It looks very much as if the union would turn him down,” noting that the AFL had contractual powers to prevent Furtwängler’s appearance.<sup>101</sup> Just days after the announcement of Furtwängler’s invitation to Chicago, the conductor answered the boycotts and protests of his colleagues by cancelling his contract. Perhaps recognizing America’s perception of him was irreversibly smeared, Furtwängler issued a gracious statement declaring, “It is inconceivable that artists should perpetuate hatred indefinitely while all the world is longing for peace. In order to spare the Chicago orchestra further difficulties, I withdraw herewith from the already concluded contract.”<sup>102</sup>

In sum, Furtwängler suffered a similar outcome as Giesecking, and despite the conductor’s more vocal appeals to the American public, their furor prevented him from performing in the United States before his death in 1954. For most Americans, he was indelibly linked to the Nazi regime’s legacies despite significant evidence supporting his opposition to anti-Semitic ideologies. Hostile journalists such as Delbert Clark and interest groups like the AFL shattered Furtwängler’s reputation in the U.S. and wholly undermined his attempts to resume his career there. It demonstrated the rigid extent to which many Americans were consumed by resentment

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.; “Petrillo Hints Union Turndown of Furtwängler.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. January 18, 1949, 10.

<sup>102</sup> “Furtwängler Voids Chicago Contract.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. January 20, 1949, 10.



and horror in the aftermath of Nazi atrocities and how these emotions permeated discourses about music and politics in the postwar period.

## CONCLUSION

In May 2013, the Deutsche Oper am Reim in Düsseldorf produced a Holocaust-inspired production of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* depicting graphic shootings and mass executions in gas chambers. Expected to be a highlight of Wagner's bicentenary celebration, the production aroused widespread horror in Germany. Some audience members were purportedly hospitalized because of the psychological trauma it inflicted. As *The New York Times* noted after its premiere, German society has "never come to terms with Wagner's mixture of artistic brilliance, poisonous anti-Semitism and, in particular, his posthumous exaltation by the Nazis." Following its opening, the Deutsche Oper am Rein issued a statement in which it acknowledged its production "led to great distress for numerous visitors," and converted the full-scale production to an oratorio-style concert.<sup>103</sup>

This dramatic example is a chilling reminder of the extent to which Germany's music and musicians became enmeshed with Nazi politics before, during, and after the Second World War. Certain segments of the United States' population thus sought to castigate musicians, who perhaps unintentionally benefitted under the Third Reich, as a damnation of the Nazi regime and its ideology. Although one's understanding of the relationship between art and power is inevitably subjective, Kirsten Flagstad, Walter Giesecking, and Wilhelm Furtwängler were all demonstrably opposed to or far removed from the most vile elements of Nazi ideologies and atrocities. For understandable reasons, in light of what became known about the horrors of the Third Reich, caustic journalists and energized Jewish and veterans' groups perpetuated a

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<sup>103</sup> Nicholas Kulish, "Germans Boo Nazi Scenes in an Opera by Wagner." *The New York Times*. May 9, 2013, accessed online. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/world/europe/uproar-in-germany-over-nazi-scenes-in-new-wagner-opera.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/world/europe/uproar-in-germany-over-nazi-scenes-in-new-wagner-opera.html?_r=0); Kate Connolly, "German Nazi-themed opera cancelled after deluge of complaints." *The Guardian*. May 9, 2013, accessed online. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/09/german-nazi-opera-cancelled-wagner-tannhauser>

punitive narrative that proved highly influential not only in damaging the postwar reputations and careers of these musicians but also in shaping American policy against them.

This thesis has further demonstrated the uneven character of denazification, its outcomes, and how these factors impacted Americans' reception of denazified artists. Because these musicians' contributions to the Nazi regime and its prestige could not be quantified, they were subjected to moral questions and partial judgments. As a result, the American perception of Flagstad, Giesecking and Furtwängler's culpability as Nazi sympathizers was intensely divided along cultural and political lines from 1945 to 1949. By virtue of sex and her previous celebrity at the Metropolitan Opera, Kirsten Flagstad survived the protests and furor of 1947 to perform at Carnegie Hall and receive astounding acclaim. Two years later, however, Walter Giesecking and Wilhelm Furtwängler faced insurmountable opposition to their very presence in the United States. Both men were firmly dedicated to their art but suffered from the American public's equally firm determination to denounce Germany's living musicians as tainted relics of Nazi evil.

Although Kirsten Flagstad—and in 1953, even Walter Giesecking—eventually overcame public and governmental opposition and performed again in New York City and across the country, Wilhelm Furtwängler's story is the most tragic and problematic example of how historical memory can be grossly obscured. The Berlin Philharmonic was prohibited from performing in the United States until the conductor's death in 1954 ended his directorship. As a result, Furtwängler and his legacy suffered from dreadful timing. With controversy fresh in peoples' minds at the time of his passing, his obituaries in American newspapers dedicated far more ink to the contentious elements of his life than to the beautiful music he produced. Significantly, Herbert von Karajan, more than twenty years his junior, who willingly joined the

Nazi Party in 1933, is virtually a household name today, remembered as one of the greatest conductors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is partly because von Karajan was the beneficiary of achieving greatness long after the fall of the Nazi regime and during the advent of recording technology. To this day, the memory of von Karajan's dynamic conducting is literally reproduced across hundreds of recordings. Although von Karajan's career was not without controversy, following Furtwängler's death he ascended to the permanent directorship of the Berlin Philharmonic and soon after gave a wildly successful tour in the United States in 1955. This disconcerting contrast illustrates the persistent problems governing America's understanding of the relationship between music and politics, then and now.

Although recent works have sought to provide correctives to these musicians' memory, historiography has remained stagnant in repurposing their legacies. In Hungarian director István Szabó's 2001 film *Taking Sides*, Furtwängler is depicted in direct opposition to the Nazi party, refusing to raise his arm in salute of Hitler and wiping his palms clean after shaking hands with a Nazi audience member.<sup>104</sup> In addition, Marian Filar's 2002 memoirs sought to reanimate Gieseeking as sympathetic to the plight of Jews during the Holocaust. Unfortunately, they appear to have gone largely unrecognized or ignored by historical works. For the reasons described in this thesis, only Flagstad was able to fully rejuvenate her career to its prewar acclaim. Nonetheless, the controversies depicted in this work illuminate the self-reinforcing relationship between music's sublimity and the potential to transfigure it into political power. While our subjective understandings prohibit duly severing this relationship, it must still be understood.

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<sup>104</sup> *Taking Sides*, directed by István Szabó (2001; New York, NY: New Yorker Video, 2004), DVD.

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